

Rep. Suzette Cooke
Rep. Jack Cairnes

P.O. Box 40600
Olympia, WA 98504-0600

Washington State Legislature
1998 Session Update

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We want
to hear
from you!

Join us in Olympia for the day!
47th District Day
at the state Capitol

Monday, Feb. 16

Join us in Olympia for the day to tour the state Capitol campus, have lunch with us and see firsthand the state Legislature in session. Please contact our offices to RSVP by Feb. 13:

Rep. Jack Cairnes
(360) 786-7858

Rep. Suzette Cooke
(360) 786-7918



or attend our
47th District
Town Hall
Meeting...

Saturday, Feb. 21

10 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.

Covington Library
27100 - 164th Ave. S.E.
Covington

For more information,
call Rep. Cairnes (360) 786-7858
or Rep. Cooke (360) 786-7918



Rep. Suzette Cooke

Contact
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Dear Friends,

During the past three years, the Legislature has made great strides in achieving the goals of protecting taxpayers, making government more accountable to you, and delivering services more efficiently and effectively.

Growth in state spending is at its lowest level in 25 years and has been held well below the limit established by Initiative 601. The massive tax increases passed in 1993 have all been repealed and permanent limits have also been placed on state and local property taxes. Historic reforms have added accountability and personal responsibility to state agencies and programs, including the welfare and juvenile justice systems.

As the mid-point of the 1998 legislative session approaches, we wanted to update you on many of the issues that are at the forefront of the Legislature's agenda this year. As the session progresses, we encourage you to contact our offices with your thoughts, ideas and opinions on these issues or other topics. Hearing from you helps us represent you more effectively.

Sincerely,

Suzette Cooke

Rep. Suzette Cooke

Jack Cairnes

Rep. Jack Cairnes



Rep. Jack Cairnes

Contact
Rep. Jack Cairnes

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Funding transportation improvements without a gas tax increase

We are strongly committed to finding responsible and effective solutions to the traffic congestion problems we face in the Puget Sound region.

As our population grows, so will the strains on our transportation system. Further, our economy depends on an efficient road system, so that goods and people can be moved in a timely manner. Without a solid infrastructure, our economic competitiveness will be greatly compromised.

However, while the governor has called for a gas tax increase of up to 11 cents-per-gallon over the next five years to pay for road improvements, Republicans in the Legislature have proposed a plan that funds the same improvements with existing revenue, not by increasing the gas tax. These are the components of the Republican proposal:

1. Make better use of MVET money.

Right now, only 16 percent of the Motor Vehicle Excise Tax (MVET), the tax you pay when licensing your car each year, goes to the state’s transportation fund. Twenty-four percent is deposited into the general fund. We propose transferring more MVET revenue from the general fund to the transportation budget to fully fund \$2.4 billion in new transportation projects over six years.

2. Use the existing budget surplus.

A portion of the state’s \$850 million budget surplus would be used to fill the hole left in the general fund from the MVET transfer, protecting other priorities like education. However, a healthy \$500 million reserve, to protect against future economic downturns, would remain.

3. Improve efficiency at the Department of Transportation.

The results of an audit of the state transportation agencies will be out soon, and will report ways to improve efficiency and save money. Those savings would be used to help fund the transportation package.

4. Cut the “car tab tax.”

The annual tax automobile owners pay to license their cars would be reduced by about \$45 per vehicle. The governor’s proposed cut was just \$35.

Because our funding package requires a transfer between budgets, it would require approval by the voters in November 1998 to re-affirm and strengthen Initiative 601.

In short, both plans provide the same amount of money for transportation projects. Both reduce the motor vehicle excise tax. And both protect programs supported by the general fund, including education. The only difference is that the Republican plan accomplishes these objectives without a tax increase.

Rep. Suzette Cooke

Staying the course on welfare reform

The 1997 Legislature brought revolutionary reform to Washington’s welfare system, sponsored by Rep. Cooke. WorkFirst, as it’s now called, is empowering those in need by requiring personal responsibility and accountability. Assistance is now temporary and all able adults are required to work or participate in work activities or community service in exchange for benefits.

And WorkFirst is working. In just two months after the first phase of changes took effect, the goal of moving 11.5 percent of welfare families off assistance by June 1999 is well ahead of schedule. Fewer families are applying for welfare.

This session, the Legislature is considering some additional improvements to welfare reform, including expanding job-placement services to the private sector and community-based organizations and tying welfare benefits to a recipients participation in the work activities on a pro-rata basis.

Giving children healthy first steps

A strong correlation has been shown between poor infant health care and later problems in life for our youth, such as increased abuse and neglect, welfare, teen pregnancy, domestic violence, and juvenile crime. Other states have been successful in breaking this destructive cycle through intervention programs that offer health-care and support services to at-risk families.

This year, the Legislature is examining how the First Steps program, now offered through Medicaid to cover pre- and post-natal care to low-income families until a child is 6 weeks old, could be expanded. An emphasis would be placed on providing health services, including nutrition and immunizations, to children of drug-addicted or teen-age parents until the age of 3, and linking parents to community services providing substance abuse treatment and parenting skills.

By intervening early with kids who are most at-risk, we can get them on the right track and help them avoid problems later in life.

Keeping focused on controlling spending, cutting taxes

Since Republicans gained the majority in the state House of Representatives in 1995, the Legislature has been successful in addressing our primary objective — protecting taxpayers.

We have approved budgets that have limited state spending and controlled the growth of government, tax cuts that have allowed Washingtonians to keep more of their own money, and changes that have made government operate more efficiently and effectively.

This responsible fiscal policy has helped grow a budget surplus of more than \$850 million this year, much of which we support saving in a “rainy day” reserve account to be used in case of future economic downturns.

This session, we are pursuing measures that further our progress in making government more accountable to taxpayers, including holding the line on state spending and steadfastly opposing any attempts to undo or weaken the I-601 spending limit. We are also continuing to fight to reduce onerous tax regulations and pursue further permanent tax relief, specifically a reduction in the “car tab tax” and further property tax reforms.

Rep. Jack Cairnes

Protecting our neighborhoods and communities

During the past three years, significant steps have been taken to improve public safety. Last year, the Legislature adopted the first meaningful and effective change in the juvenile justice system in over two decades. The key? Giving police, prosecutors and judges the authority and flexibility they need to provide an appropriate sentence every time a teen-ager breaks the law — beginning with the first offense.

This year, we are continuing our efforts by addressing problems in security and supervision at juvenile facilities and groups homes. Changes we are considering would help ensure these facilities adequately protect the public from harm by the offenders they house to keep our communities safe.

Rep. Cairnes has also sponsored legislation to increase the penalties for residential burglary to help protect people in their homes.

Combating domestic violence

Rep. Cairnes and other lawmakers have sponsored numerous provisions to help protect the victims of domestic violence. The proposals include:

- Prohibiting domestic violence felony offenders from being released while awaiting sentencing or the outcome of an appeal.
- Authorizing a no-bail arrest warrant for someone accused of domestic violence who violates a condition of their release.
- Increasing the penalties for felony domestic violence convictions if priorly convicted of a misdemeanor domestic violence offense.
- Requiring sentencing to include no-contact orders and/or other restrictions following release from prison.

Improving learning by emphasizing reading

When children can’t read, they can’t learn. That’s why our priority in education continues to be improving the literacy of our K-12 students. Recent test scores among fourth-grade students show that less than half of them met the standards of reading ability for their age.

In the Legislature, we have been making reading education a top priority for the past several years. Many lawmakers have focused on the problems in the way reading is now taught, and bringing effective, research-based techniques back into each and every classroom. That’s an important step.

Another is accountability. The Legislature is also pursuing measures to provide strict accountability for increasing student academic achievement. These measures include strengthening the high school diploma so it becomes a meaningful document of achievement, freeing local schools from the unnecessary and excessive government regulations and red tape that thwart efforts to improve education, and increasing local control and parental involvement in schools.